

Broken Bars

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Summary: A prisoner in Azkaban with no name, no past, no future.

Could he possibly be redeemed?

1. Prologue

Untitled Document

"Broken Bars"

> Prologue<div>

A tall man with dark hair strode confidently up Diagon Alley. The few milling witches and wizards paid him little notice; they were hurrying home from a long afternoon's shopping, or busy locking up shop. A few were straying toward the Ministry of Magic Headquarters at the top of Diagon Alley; a Ministry meeting was taking place that night.

The man slowed down. After all, he was in no hurry. Wand held loosely between his fingers, he turned and headed toward the Ministry offices, whistling a bit. Not that the man in the long, black cloak was a member of the Ministry... _Anything but, _he thought forcefully.

The towers of the Ministry glittered against the night sky, windows aglow. With a twisted grin, the dark-haired man tightened the grip on his wand. The place was a sitting duck.

He had reached the top of the cobbled street. With his eyes locked on the building, he began to mutter furiously under his breath. The tip of his wand began to glow. This was a powerful curse to work, especially without preparation; _But, then again, _he thought to himself, sweat creeping down his brow, _I'm no ordinary wizard, am I?_

But there was no time for that now. He turned his full attention to the larger window on the fourth floor of the building. Master had

told him to take out the main meeting room, and that room, only. The man with the dark hair was not sure why - it would, after all, be more efficient to destroy the entire building, wouldn't it? - but the Dark Lord was not one to be questioned.

His breathing was quick and shallow. Knuckles white, his incoherent murmurs mounted to a roar; with a furious shout, he threw himself forward, arms flailing. Blazing red flames sprung up around him, and thick streaks of lightning shot toward the Ministry office. The dark-haired man collapsed onto the street, gasping for air, head pounding. His wand fell from his fingers and lay on the ground, smoking.

The resounding explosion from the Ministry was deafening. The spell had hit, right on target, by the sound of it. Triumphant, he tried to push himself to his feet...but now, there was a deep rumbling - he looked up - a scarlet beam of light was ricocheting off the building and was now bearing down on him - he threw his arms up in a vain attempt at self-protection...

And then everything went black.

2. Part I - A Thread of Light

Untitled Document

"Broken Bars"

> Part One
 A Thread of Light

The prisoner in cell thirty-nine shifted onto his back, pressing one cheek against the damp wall. If he tilted his head the right way, squinting hard, he could see a crack of light glowing faintly, between the ceiling and the wall.

Somewhere, somewhere outside his terrible prison, a sun was shining.

He stretched his fingers toward the tiny glint of gold. If he concentrated hard enough, he could almost feel its warmth, almost remember sunlight...

But no; he couldn't remember anything, couldn't even recall his name, his life before Azkaban. He knew only the cold, dark cell, the shouts of anger from the other prisoners, and the icy terror that gripped his heart whenever the Dementors passed by...

The Dementors. He could sense them before they glided down the halls, feel the inexplicable fear that emanated from their haunting forms. Even now, just thinking about them, the prisoner felt the chill sink deep into his bones. He flinched involuntarily.

There was a scrape from the door of his cell. A tiny flap had been lifted, and a wooden tray was shoved through; a tray that, the prisoner knew, without groping through the dark, held a short cup of grimy water, a pitiful piece of beef, and a rough, doughy slice of bread.

But he didn't want to waste a moment when he could gaze up at the thin crack of light, waiting, and wondering.

*

Cornelius Fudge puffed a bit as he climbed the stairs to Azkaban Prison. It was a dreary day, and gray clouds hung low over the rolling sea. _I still can't believe we're doing this, _Fudge thought, gripping the damp railing with both hands. _Ministry's never gone in this direction before...if Albus hadn't..._

Fudge shook his head to push away his confused thoughts, then shivered. Even though the Dementors had been called off, the permanent chill of the rocky island was settling somewhere in his heart.

The tall stone doors of Azkaban towered high above Fudge's head. With the sigh of one resigned to the worst, he lifted the heavy iron knocker.

The booming thuds echoed somewhere beyond. Slowly, one of the doors creaked open; Fudge found himself looking into the bright gray eyes of Melander Mancep, the Azkaban warden.

"Ah, Fudge," he said, smiling thinly and opening the door. "Unusual circumstances, I understand...but we'll have to hurry, the Dementors can only be detained for so long."

Fudge nodded, but did not allow Mancep to remove his cloak. "How have you been, Melander?"

"Ah, well." Mancep strode down the cold, bare entrance hall. He always had made Fudge quite uncomfortable.

_But what would you expect, living in a place like this? _Fudge thought. With another shiver, he followed Mancep down toward the prisoners' cells.

"Near the back, he is," Mancep called over his shoulder. He took a torch from the wall and lighted it with a tap of his wand. Fudge began the nasty descent to the vaults, trying to keep away from the bony hands of prisoners reaching through the bars...

"Richard! They've killed him!" screamed one man, eyes glowing through the darkness. Another prisoner was murmuring some sort of curse under his breath, staring fixedly at the wall. With increasing doubt of Dumbledore's sanity, Fudge walked a bit faster.

"Cell thirty-nine," said Mancep, finally, taking a large ring of keys from his pocket. He unlocked the bars of the cell, and Fudge stepped back nervously.

A thin man in ragged clothes was lying on the floor. Fudge thought him asleep - or perhaps in some sort of stupor - but when the cell door opened, he sat up and crawled into a corner. Crouching there, he threw his hands over his head in a feeble attempt to protect himself.

Now Mancep was moving into the cell, pulling at the prisoner. "This," he said grimly, is Achenar Anser."

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He had known that his day was different. The permanent cold of the Dementors had faded away, and the tiny crack of light was just a bit brighter. This had happened before, but time meant nothing to this prisoner - there was only light, and the darkness between.

Then, when the door to his cell had opened; he had only thought a Dementor was upon him, and, as always, tried to disappear. But no; it was a thin man in a dark cloak, and he was tugging on the prisoner's arms.

"Achenar Anser," he had said. "This is Achenar Anser." Spoken words, such as he had never heard - he was used to unintelligible screams and wailing - seemed to fill a part of him, a part that had been empty before.

And those words, specifically...Achenar Anser...seemed to invoke something, was it...recognition?

"C'mon now, get up." The man sounded a bit impatient. At a loss for what to do, the prisoner struggled to his feet. A wizard in a pin-striped suit was hovering nervously outside the cell.

The prisoner couldn't believe it. He was being led out of his cell, into the hallway. A flaming torch cast light on the stone floor, and dancing patterns dazzled his eyes. His two companions led him up a flight of stairs.

The other prisoners were strangely quiet, and it filled him with unease.

"Do you have his paperwork, Melander?" It took a moment for him to register the words. Human speech still seemed a foreign language, one he only half-understood.

"Everything's in order, Minister." His voice was taut.

The two men were silent as they continued upward. The prisoner felt his heart beating rapidly, thumping against his ribs. He was suddenly seized with a fear of what lay above; his cell was horrible, but at least the cold darkness was familiar.

They stepped into a great entrance hall. The walls stretched high above their heads, and now the Minister was clearing his throat.

"Er...Mr. Anser? We'll have to Apparate to Diagon Alley. If you'll just..."

But his words were lost on the prisoner. He suddenly realized that this Achenar was...was him. He had a name; he had an identity. This blow caught him with incredible force, and he doubled over, but now their surroundings had faded; they were in a small room with white-washed walls, so bright that Achenar covered his eyes with grimy fingers.

"Amelia?" The Minister called out uncertainly, brushing off the sleeves of his suit. "We've got him."

A woman in flowing white robes swished into the room. She looked at

Achenar and did a double take. "Wow."

"Yes, I know," said the Minister, a bit wearily. "I'll go and fetch Dumbledore. Said he wanted to talk to him." He jerked his head toward Achenar before disappearing.

The woman - Amelia - was now walking around him, looking both worried and curious. "Wow," she repeated. Achenar returned her questioning gaze, and she shivered a bit before turning away.

"Malnourished, muscle atrophy, some sort of skin disease," she murmured to herself. Amelia pulled something from within her robes, and began to circle around Achenar once more. "What _happened_ to you?"

His eyelids were lowering. The room blurred.

*

"Albus?"

Cornelius Fudge looked into the tiny office. Headmaster Dumbledore was sitting at a marble-topped table, sipping tea and reading the _Daily Prophet_, looking perfectly calm.

"Mmm?"

"We've got the prisoner...er, Achenar, here. Albus, the man looks terrible." Cornelius leaned against the empty chair, took a deep breath. "Are you...are you _certain_ _that_ this was a good idea? After all, he _is_ a convicted felon..."

"Yes, Cornelius," said Albus, firmly. "Our current position is not negotiable. We need him. Mr. Anser's capacity for magic...he was the only known conductor of this curse. Not particularly admirable, really, but desperate times call for desperate measures."

Fudge was still shaking his head. "And then...if he can lift it...he'll go straight back to Azkaban, won't he?"

Dumbledore stroked his beard with graceful fingers. "Yes."

*

When Achenar awoke, he was lying on his back. His first instinct was to search for the crack of light, but it was not there. Then he remembered, and his world seemed to whirl and disappear. With trembling fingers, Achenar reached up for his face. The tangled beard that had straggled down his chin for so long was gone. One cheek was rough, and Achenar realized it must have been from inching along the floor of his cell.

"Waking up, are we?" A plump woman with a blond bun was leaning over him, feeling his pulse and biting her lip. "Amelia's tired herself out working on you...and I can see why. You've been through a bit of a spot, haven't you?"

Her eyes were blue and sparkling.

"I'm Madame Prewett, head of this Healing Department. Memory

problems, they said. Most of what I say won't make must sense, I warrant. Oh, Professor Dumbledore's coming up to see you, right soon, I daresay..."

Her stream of endless chatter washed over Achenar as she helped him to his feet. He felt a bit unsteady, swaying back and forth. His hands, usually filthy and bleeding, had been scrubbed clean. A new set of robes hung loosely on his slim frame.

"This way," said Madame Prewett, guiding Achenar gently out of the room. They entered a small office down the hall.

Inside, a man with a long, silvery beard was peering at him over half-moon glasses.

"Ah, Mr. Anser," he said. He signaled for Achenar to sit at his table, which he did, a bit awkwardly. "I am Albus Dumbledore." Albus Dumbledore extended a hand to Achenar, who only looked at him, blankly.

"Yes," said Dumbledore, uneasily. Then he brightened. "I'm sure you have lots of questions for us, Achenar. For now...we're in the Healers' offices at Diagon Alley. The Healers will be caring for you for as long as necessary, until you are healthy enough to work with us."

Achenar coughed. All this was happening so fast, his head was pounding. He opened his mouth. "W-why," he croaked out. His lips felt strange around the words, throat stretching painfully.

Dumbledore blinked. "I'm not sure you will understand quite yet, Achenar," he said, carefully. "We'll try to take this one step at a time. Now, why don't you go and get some rest?"

Madame Prewett reappeared, and Achenar allowed himself to be led back to his room, lowered onto the lumpy pallet. Under the blankets, he curled himself into a ball, head tucked between his knees. He stared at nothing until sleep claimed him.

3. Part II - Recollections

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"Broken Bars"

> Part Two
 Recollections

_I'm sorry if this story is taking so long to post.

> It's one of the first I've planned out the entire plot for,
 but, since it's the end of the school year, and I've
> also been working on some other projects unrelated
 to Harry Potter. Anyway, enjoy, and don't forget to review...
> ~Sparkle~

"There's something about that Achenar fellow that worries me."

Madame Prewett was making her rounds, Amelia at her heels. They had just begun to tidy up a snoozing patient's room when the elder Healer had spoken.

"What do you mean?" Amelia asked, straightening the contents of a polished bureau.

Madame Prewett shook her head, and moved to look in on the invalid. "I can't put my finger on it." Amelia watched her practiced hands move swiftly above the patient, never quite touching him, but checking his pulse and carefully tucking in the loose sheet.

"Well." Kathleen Prewett straightened up. "You did a fine job on him, at any rate. He was looking much better this afternoon."

"It was difficult," Amelia mused, following her mentor down a corridor. "I've worked on people with worse injuries, but it was something else...his spirit, his being was weak..."

"Excellent," said Madame Prewett, proudly. "You're learning quickly, Amelia; you'll make an great Healer."

Amelia persisted, although Madame Prewett's praise (valuable, when directed towards an apprentice) was well-accepted. "What's happened to him, anyhow?"

"The Ministry's been quite secretive," Madame Prewett whispered. "Even Dumbledore doesn't want to tell us anything, not yet, at any rate. I think Mr. Anser was kept prisoner somewhere...maybe even in one of You-Know-Who's holding cells."

Amelia felt increased respect for the dark-haired man in the room down the hall. "How awful," she said softly.

"There's also an interesting side of this memory case...it appears that the effects of his ordeal weren't permanent."

*

"Expelliarmus!"

"No, deeper. And hold your wand like this..."

"_Expelliarmus!_"

Amelia's wand shot out of her hand and clattered to the floor. She clapped her hands. "That's excellent!" Then, checking her watch, "Oh, dear...I've got to run. I'm not supposed to be teaching you, anyhow!" She picked up her wand and waved before dashing down the hall.

Achenar rearranged his fingers on his own wand. It had been given to him a short time ago, and the pulsing warmth of the wood felt comfortable in his hands. "Expelliarmus," he murmured, waving his arm about. Then he tucked his wand into his belt and walked out the door.

After nearly a month at the Healers', Achenar had been granted free reign of Diagon Alley. He attracted less attention in the streets, now that his skin had lost its garish tint and he was not as hideously thin.

And his mind felt open...clearer, not confused, and he went about his simple life happily. It was comforting to wander about his tidy bedroom, and he often stared wonderingly into the sun...until Madame Prewett insisted that he would ruin his eyesight.

Walking down Diagon Alley, in itself, was soothing. Sometimes he would be overcome with recollection while passing a cart of ice cream, a crowded street corner...remembered the taste of almond-fudge strawberry, or waiting for a time at a lamp-post.

But then, as he would turn to stroll toward the Ministry Headquarters, an odd shiver would run down his spine, and he would turn away.

Today, Achenar strolled down the street. Suddenly, he stopped. A narrow alleyway, which led between Trenton Trinket's Odds and Ends and an apothecary's, lay before him.

Achenar stepped under a low stone arch, and the bustle of Diagon Alley faded away. The alley was strangely silent. He could almost _hear_ dust settling on the loose cobblestones that were sticking up about this street.

A hand-lettered sign proclaiming _Knockturn Alley_ hung precariously from its withered post. The street was shady and dim, and dirty windows leered from sidewalks like so many wary pairs of eyes. Shabbily dressed wizards walked quickly down the street. It was not the hustled walk of an irritated Diagon Alley witch; it was cold and efficient. A feeling of unease crept along the sidewalks like spreading fog.

Achenar hurried on, having half a mind to turn around and start back towards the noisy brightness of Diagon Alley. However, something propelled him, and he continued down the dark street.

He was peering into the window of Borgin and Burkes, at a display of what looked like dried entrails, when he heard the voice.

"Achenar...Achenar..."

It was scarcely a whisper, and, if not for the quiet of the street, Achenar couldn't have heard it.

The speaker was a wizened old wizard, crouched on the cracked sidewalk. Graying hair spilled over his shoulders, and his eyes were pale; cloudy.

Achenar swallowed. "W-what?"

"Almost didn't recognize you," the old man croaked, "you've returned...He will be angry..."

Achenar took a step backward. "Who?"

"He will be angry," the wizard hissed, "you failed, you have returned..."

He stumbled over the curb in his haste to escape. The wizard cackled

maniacally as Achenar broke into a run, hurtling back to Diagon Alley.

*

"He's coming along nicely," said Madame Prewett. "Ready to leave us soon, you know."

Fudge nodded, tapping his fingers on the polished desk. "We have one of our professors working with him...hopefully, it won't be long until he regains most of his magical ability."

Madame Prewett swallowed. She knew now that Achenar had been in a prison, somewhere, for more than ten years, and all that Cornelius Fudge cared about was his 'magical ability.' But who could argue with the Minister?

"My apologies, Minister; I have a patient. Good day to you." Madame Prewett bowed herself from the room.

*

Achenar had rented a room at the Leaky Cauldron, a tiny niche that provided a mediocre view of Diagon Alley. He moved about the neat flat, straightening the few possessions he had accumulated at the House of Healing. Then he pulled open the curtains, and watched the fading sunlight spill across the floor. After he had, by habit, moved his chair into the patch of warmth, Achenar settled his gaze on a nearby rooftop and sunk deep into his thoughts.

He felt as though he was living in a dream...part of him was still huddled in a cold, dark, Azkaban cell; the other, clean-shaven and bright-eyed, sat bathed in sunshine. Sometimes, Achenar was afraid of awakening and being transported back to prison, afraid that his new life was only another wishful fantasy.

But no; he could feel the smooth wood of his wand, which he now carried everywhere, and the soft carpet beneath his feet. When he was outside, the wind cooled his face, and the moon glowed faintly at night. His fingers on his arm were real. He had a life.

However, even now he was pantomiming a normal man, playing a practiced role. He smiled and nodded at those who greeted him in the streets, chatted politely with Fudge - who Achenar suspected despised him no matter what he tried to pretend - when he had paid visits to the Healers'.

Most irritating of all was the way nurses and Ministry officials calmly avoided his questions. Achenar was remembering more as each week passed, but there were still blanks in his clouded history...parts he wanted to fill in, moments he couldn't - or wouldn't - remember.

"You'll have to be patient," Madame Prewett had said, on more than one account. "Memory is both a fragile and powerful thing. You must wait for it to return to you."

Still, Achenar was tired of having his thoughts controlled.

Achenar picked up the book he was supposed to be reading: A Complete

History of Magic. _To make Professor Lepid - his teacher - happy, he had begun to summarize chapters as he read them. It was tedious, but the history itself was fascinating.

"_Then, T.M. Riddle disappeared from the area for nearly ten years...he was later spotted in Germany, and then in Norway, before finally coming to rest in Wales. Out of nowhere, Riddle reappeared in London, now calling himself the Dark Lord, and began his reign of terror with a horrifying display of power at a social gathering in Diagon Alley."_

_ _Achenar flipped through the chapter, skimmed a few paragraphs. They didn't tell him much, other than that the Dark Lord was the most feared leader in the wizarding world; he had remained dormant for nearly a year, but many people were afraid he would return soon, and more powerful than ever.

Achenar shivered and closed the book. He looked out at the sun, which was sinking lower in the coral-pink sky.

_It was cold. Cold fire, green flames surrounded him.

> "It was You-Know-Who, of course..."
 "There are the wizards..."

> "Two nearly killed..."

_ _It was a vision that had returned to haunt him again; first as a dream, now bordering on reality.

There was a sudden rapping at the door.

Achenar came close to jumping out of his chair. Once he had recovered, he crossed to the door and opened it; Professor Lepid's thin face looked into his.

"Good evening," he said, cheerfully, as he deposited an enormous stack of books and papers into Achenar's arms. "Did you finish the twelfth chapter? I want to start on Transfiguration soon, and you'll need some background information."

Achenar watched, fascinated, as always, at Professor Lepid's enthusiasm. He flicked through the pages of _Transfiguration Tomorrow_, shook his head, and reached for another book. Then he marked a few passages with his quill, and passed the book to Achenar.

"Study this," he said. "I want to work a bit more on defenses, now, all right?"

Achenar nodded and took out his wand. Lepid readied himself, raised his own, and fired a bundle of blue sparks at Achenar.

Achenar knew the incantation, knew the proper defense, knew the words that would send Lepid's attack sputtering harmlessly to the floor. This was why he couldn't explain the words that rose to his lips, and the blazing green flames that shot from _his_ wand, missing Lepid's face by inches.

It was a stroke of luck, the way Lepid had fallen backwards onto the floor from shock.

*

"It's quite normal," said Madame Prewett. "When we learn, we do it gradually, moving along at our own pace. Achenar is remembering things he learned before, so he moves along in fits and starts. Sometimes he'll jump ahead, and use a spell that's more advanced...sometimes he'll fall backward, remembering something that happened long ago."

Fudge nodded. "We can't do anything about it?"

"I'm afraid not. We'll all have to be patient. I suggest that Achenar be given a week or so to rest...after all, he's learning twice as fast as usual."

"But we've already wasted so much time..."

"It will not be healthy if he's forced to advance at a faster pace. What do you expect of Achenar, Minister?"

Fudge leaned back in his chair and sighed. "I suppose I should start at the beginning...it's a rather long story."

One that was never exactly supposed to be told, he thought begrudgingly. _But we can't move on without the Healers hearing..._

"Fifteen years ago, there was an attack on the Ministry building...yes, the one here, in Diagon Alley. It was an immensely complex curse, you'll have to ask Albus for the full details...one that any decent wizard would not get the _least_ idea of...three Ministry officers were killed."

"Oh, my, yes, I _do_ remember _that._..."

Fudge allowed himself a knowing nod. "One of You-Know-Who's supporters, no doubt. He was imprisoned in Azkaban, as you can imagine." Fudge paused, then carefully continued. "Just this year, a few of our Ministry's officers fell ill. We investigated; it looks to be the same curse that was used years before. Anyhow, that's what Achenar will help us lift."

"You can't be serious...I mean, the man does have the endurance, but it's only been a matter of months..."

"It's a dire situation, Madame Prewett. We can't wait much longer."

*

Achenar paced angrily back and forth across the floor of his flat, examining and reexamining his wand. He had apologized profusely to Professor Lepid, but the young teacher had still looked distinctly shaken upon leaving.

When he tried, Achenar could easily perform the proper defense spell that had been his demise hours earlier...but he could not explain the strange effects his wand had actually produced.

With a deep sigh, Achenar collapsed onto his bed. He soon sunk into a

dreamless sleep, punctuated only by a recurring dream...

_ 'That's Casseopia,' she said, pointing up into the velvet sky. 'And there's Castor, and Pollux, too.' _

_ Achenar looked up towards the sparkling stars that seemed to hang only inches from his grasp. '_

_ Mars,' she added, and then looked at Achenar, quizzically._

_ 'Er...the moon,' he supplied, with a grin. She laughed._

End
file.